



Jambolia: Old Fashioned Rug Reborn For Export

Zoran Gavrilovski owned a factory which wove wool rugs known as “jambolias” in the former Yugoslavian republic of Macedonia. However, in 1991, Yugoslavia was transformed into independent countries (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia). The Balkan crisis closed Macedonia’s new borders and prevented Zoran from accessing his traditional customers in the former Yugoslavia.

After ten years, Zoran’s factory had shrunk from 85 employees to only eight. His sales had fallen from \$1,200,000 per year to only \$100,000 because he was restricted to Macedonia’s small and relatively poor market with occasional sales to Kosovo and Albania.

In May 2003, Zoran was “discovered” by USAID through the Aid to Artisans (ATA) program. The marketing manager of ATA visited Zoran’s small rug store and convinced him to join ATA’s Product Development Program. ATA helped Zoran identify new colors and designs, and a completely new marketing strategy based on a target market in New York. Zoran’s “new” jambolia owes much to its traditional forbears but it is crafted for modern, international markets.



Photo: USAID Macedonia/Lynn Abbott

The washtub simulates a mountain waterfall at Zoran’s workshop.

In Macedonia, USAID is working together with ATA to help craftsmen build their traditional skills into modern businesses. With USAID backing, ATA supports Zoran in the creation of new designs, sources of new materials, and development of marketing strategies. Zoran selected new colors and designs that would preserve the traditional character of the jambolia, but which would appeal to urban consumers.

Traditionally, jambolia’s were thrown into the turbulent waters of Macedonia’s mountain streams to be washed. Zoran designed a huge wooden tub that simulates a mountain stream, but doesn’t contaminate the environment with gallons of soap. His new rugs are made of soft, fine wool - the kind used for sweaters.

After only twelve months of collaboration with the Aid to Artisans project and USAID, Zoran is carefully courting business prospects abroad worth up to a million dollars annually.

While participating in an ATA marketing training, Zoran met a buyer at the New York Gift Fair and took his first order for \$37,237. Satisfied with the product, the buyer called for additional shipments. In May 2004, Zoran returned to New York to attend the “Sources” trade show and met with the buyer again to take an order for a fourth container.

Although Macedonia’s unemployment rate hovers near 37%, Zoran’s productive capability is luring manufacturing back into Macedonia. “My goal is to make the Macedonian Jambolia famous,” says Zoran. Exports so far have reached about \$250,000. After only six months of collaboration with ATA and USAID, Zoran had begun exporting to the United States. Today he is carefully courting international business prospects worth up to a million dollars annually. Zoran’s factory now employs almost thirty people and he is exploring additional markets in Europe.

